

Drunkenness and Discipline: “Misconduct” and its Consequences in World War I

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Alexandra V. Romfoe (romfo012@umn.edu)

Faculty Mentor: Evan Roberts, Sociology (eroberts@umn.edu)

Introduction

World War I is regarded as an exceptionally traumatic and bloody war that substantially impacted the lives of soldiers who fought. Despite the obvious social, psychological, and physical impacts the war had on these soldiers, there is little social science research on what happened to the soldiers during and after the war. With access to thousands of soldiers files who fought with the New Zealand Army through Professor Roberts’ website Measuring the ANZACs, I set forth the proposal to examine the misconduct records of a group of WWI soldiers. My intention of this research was to analyze the consequences and the extent of discipline of misconduct incidences in a group of enlisted soldiers. Throughout the course of the semester, I transcribed the files of 58 men totaling 102 separate misconduct incidences and categorized their offences and punishments received.

Description of Data

The data used to conduct this research were the personnel files from New Zealand during World War I. These files were digitized and publicly accessible online at Professor Roberts’ UMN supported citizen science project, Measuring the ANZACs (<http://www.measuringtheanzacs.org/>) which Professor Roberts leads a citizen science project to transcribe these files. As individuals transcribed the files, any incidences of misconduct were flagged, as they were the topic of interest for this research; I was then able to review them further.

Research Conducted

In order to obtain the necessary data for this research, I utilized a spreadsheet of the flagged files of soldiers with misconduct incidents. During the course of the semester I read the individual files that had been scanned into the Measuring the ANZACs website; this was a time consuming process as the files were hand written in small, cramped, often mildly illegible, fonts in pencil that had faded some over the past 100 years. In the end, I was able to successfully transcribe 58

individual soldiers' files totaling 102 offences committed by the men. It was found that approximately one in five men enrolled in the New Zealand Army had at least one misconduct incident during WWI, with a prevalence such as this, it is astounding that there is a notable lack of scholarly research involving this data.

Once the files were transcribed, I, with the assistance of Professor Roberts, established a typology of the offences found in the records in order to assist with the further analysis of the data. The offenses were categorized as follows:

- Absence without leave and overstaying leave
- Drunkenness
- Insubordination and disrespect offences
- Theft or damage of property
- Disobeying orders
- Other miscellaneous offences

By and large, absence without leave and overstaying leave were the most common offences. We also observed that drunkenness was frequently associated with other offences, and was seldom observed as an offence by itself. This is quite contradictory to civilian life at the time when drunkenness was a major category of offence in and of itself.

We also worked together to categorize the punishments to the aforementioned offences; the punishments fell into four major categories:

- Deprivation of pay
- Deprivation of liberties: such as being confined to barracks
- Reprimands
- Physical restraint in the form of Field Punishment #1 and Field Punishment #2
 - **Field Punishment #1**- The convicted man was brought to a field punishment camp a few miles behind the front line, however there is speculation that some individuals having received this punishment within the range of enemy fire. The man was tethered to a

standing object such as a gun wheel or fence post for up to 2 hours a day. The arms were stretched out or tied behind the back, and legs tied together.

- **Field Punishment #2-** Much like Field Punishment #1, the convicted man's arms were tethered behind his back, however, he was not tethered to a fixed object.

Physical punishments were found to be the most extreme and were infrequently observed except in extraordinary cases. Whereas deprivation of pay and liberties were the most common punishments and often accompanied absence without leave; the most commonly observed offence.

Conclusion

By the end of the semester, I, under the supervision of Sociology Professor Evan Roberts, was able to transcribe and review numerous soldier personnel files flagged with misconduct incidents from the publicly accessible website: Measuring the ANZACs, and successfully established a workable framework for the future analysis by researchers of this grossly underexplored and important topic. From our research we identified a paired set of research questions that should be examined in future research and investigation of this topic:

- Was drunkenness regarded as a mitigating or aggravating factor in punishments. For similar offences, did the presence of drunkenness in the record as well intensify or moderate punishments?
- The major categories of punishment were deprivation of pay or liberties. What was the “exchange rate” between these? How many days deprivation of pay was equivalent to deprivation of liberties. Confining men to barracks or other restrictions on freedom were punishments, yet also deprived the forces of potentially useful soldiers.

This research was just the metaphorical “tip of the iceberg” in an infantile and hopefully expanding field of research. We regard the findings of this research as significant and ground on which the aforementioned possible research questions should be investigated. Further investigation into the records may also attempt to place the context of misconduct and

punishment in the history of men's service, and the passage of the war, taking advantage of the detailed information that is being collected and transcribed about these men.